CHAPTER 12

Social Convoys

Studying Linked Lives in Time, Context, and Motion

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Social research is, by definition, about relationships, but most scholars study individuals. Why this methodological individualism? First, individuals are much easier (and cheaper) to survey than families, groups, networks, or organizations. Second, most methods of quantitative analysis assume independence across analytic units, discouraging research designs that incorporate connections between respondents. Third, individuals seem somehow more "permanent"; families, friendship networks, and teams change over time as members join or leave. Scholars undertaking longitudinal studies find it far easier to follow individuals, because group memberships shift with each passing year.

For example, the *Panel Study of Income Dynamics* (PSID) began as a study of 5,000 family households in 1968. Each subsequent survey year documented people's movement in and out of the core families/households with remarkable frequency: starting new households (and families), dissolving existing arrangements, and/or moving into others. These changes made it difficult to continue to identify and to collect data over time on the "original" families in the 1968 study. The PSID founders decided the solution was to follow *all* individual family members *and* their emergent households, not only expanding the sample exponentially over time but also creating a national treasure of data

on lives in time. The PSID has now collected information on over 7,000 families and more than 65,000 individuals, spanning multiple decades of people's lives.

Linked Lives as Convoys and Contexts

Life course scholars (e.g., Elder, 1974; Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003; Shanahan & Macmillan, 2007) highlight the embeddedness of individuals within the social fabric of evolving, overlapping networks of close and distal ties. For example, early scholarship on status attainment charted the career paths of individuals (men) but showed the links between fathers' and sons' occupational prestige. However, this influential body of theoretical and empirical analysis of men's occupational attainment did not take into account the fact that men in the mid-20th century could focus on their jobs precisely because they had wives taking care of everything else. Life course scholars Pavalko and Elder (1993) demonstrated the importance of wives as partners in their husbands' careers.

In this chapter we underscore how individual lives are always *linked lives* (Elder, 1985a); one person's resources, resource deficits, successes, failures, chronic strains, and (expected or unexpected) transitions can become focal conditions, even turning points, in the lives of others, especially other family members. For example, when scholars began investigating women's status attainment and gender inequality in the 1980s and 1990s, they captured a range of career paths that did not follow the conventional (male) lockstep career progression. Women's status attainment and wages continue to be shaped by their transitions into and out of jobs, the workforce, and schooling, often accommodating the careers of husbands and the care needs of children and aging relatives (Blossfeld & Hofmeister, 2006; Moen & Roehling, 2005).

Men's lives are also embedded in the matrix of others' lives. For example, a father may forgo a promotion requiring relocation because his oldest son is a high school junior and wants to graduate from his current school with his friends. Both these examples capture what we mean by "social convoys": the dynamics of linked lives over time. The father moves through his own occupational career even as his son grows up and moves through schooling. Both fathers and children, and husbands and wives are part of each other's social convoy, along with other family and social network members (e.g., Bengtson, 2001; Mortimer, 2003).

We use the term "social convoys" to connote linked lives that play out as dynamic *ongoing relationships of two or more people over time.* Kahn and Antonucci (1980) first introduced the concept of social convoys to capture networks of kin and friends. We build on their original formula-

tion of these convoys as supportive by also considering these (and other) ties as potentially fostering conflicts and strains, as well as adaptive strategies, at different points in the life course.

Note that although we focus in this chapter on social convoys, lives and relationships are also molded by "time convoys": the taken-for-granted institutionalized bundles of time- and age-related rules, resources, and expectations "attached" to particular roles, relationships, and network memberships (see also Moen & Chesley, 2008). We imagine time convoys as invisible tugboats, channeling people into or out of activities and experiences (and locations) based on the legitimated norms around time (e.g., going to one's job on Mondays, using weekends for fun and domestic work, leaving at noon for lunch). Time convoys include expectations about time to be "spent" in relationships such as parenting, being a neighbor, and caring for aging parents. They also operate to construct and constrain age-graded life course paths (e.g., occupational career paths) and relationships (e.g., marriage and parenting).

Plan of the Chapter

In this chapter we suggest techniques and strategies for capturing the embeddedness of individuals within the lives of others as linked lives at any one point in time and as social convoys over time. First, we encourage researchers to bring social contexts back into their studies of individuals, embedding individual respondents within the contexts of the people in their lives. Second, we encourage use of social groupings as units of analysis when it makes theoretical sense, and a move from studying individuals' beliefs and behaviors to studying relational units—the beliefs and behaviors of married couples, family members, social networks, or work groups.

We draw on research on couples as our primary case example to illustrate how researchers can profit from theorizing and operationalizing the concept of individuals in relational contexts, as well as using higher-level units of two or more people as their focus of analysis. Changing the analytic unit from the individual man or woman, husband or wife, to the couple (husband *and* wife) captures a couple's joint resources, status, and circumstances, as well as the within-couple division of resources, power, decision making, and behavior. We also touch briefly on other types of linked lives: the intergenerational experiences of parents and children, and the role of coworkers as shapers of employees' experiences and expectations.

Data Sources and Analytic Approaches

To study couples and families/households requires creation of couple-level (or family-level) variables: concepts and measures that cannot be reduced to, or created from, information on just one person. Examples include household income, household composition, age dispersion, degree of educational homogamy within the household, frequency of family conflict, styles of couples' decision making, and ranges of social network ties common to all household members. Armed with such variables, the researcher can then compare and contrast households of various types, in various locations, in different historical periods, across cultures, and/or at different points in the life course. Alternatively, the researcher can investigate within-couple variables, such as couples' agreement about the household division of paid and unpaid labor, or couples' conjoint descriptions of their decision-making processes.

Couple or Higher-Level Variables

Sometimes couple-level variables are dependent variables, the outcomes of interest. For example, Altobelli and Moen (2007) used latent class analysis to identify couple patterns of "work–family spillover" (the degree to which each spouse sees work as "spilling over" into their home lives and vice versa. They investigated the positive and negative work-to-family and family-to-work spillover of both spouses, and found three distinct couple spillover constellations: *conjointly negative*, *enriched*, and *husband (only) negative*. This provides far more insight, and potentially more explanatory power, than knowing, for example, only husbands' level of work–family conflict. Using data from a second survey wave 2 years later, Altobelli and Moen analyzed the conditions at work and at home that increased the likelihood of couples moving from one constellation to another.

Couple-level measures are also useful as independent variables in predicting outcomes related to individuals. For example, in their study of "coworking couples" (both partners working for the same employer), Moen and Sweet (2002; Sweet & Moen, 2007) created a typology of dual earners based on whether both spouses have professional occupations, the husband only, the wife only, or neither partner has a professional-level job. They found that wives report more negative spillover from work to family in coworking couples in which only the wives are professionals (their husbands hold nonprofessional, lower-status jobs), compared to the reported spillover by wives when both partners are in nonprofessional jobs.

A life course perspective on linked lives encourages analysis of similarities and differences between couples at different ages and stages. Clarkberg and Moen (2001) drew on couple-level data from the National Study of Families and Households to assess the gap between actual and preferred working hours of men and women in couples, examining the size of this gap at different ages and life stages.

Another life course approach is to look for changes when one or both spouses undergo a major life course transition or life event, such as having a baby, moving, being laid off, being diagnosed with an illness, or retiring.

Given that most researchers only have access to data on individuals, what is the best way to capture lives as linked at one point in time or as social convoys over time? Let us say that a survey of employees (as individuals) includes some information obtained from the employee respondents about their spouses. Typically, independent variables for each spouse (e.g., working hours) are included in regression equations separately, with the researcher looking for additive or interaction effects between them. But we find it instructive to construct *couple-level measures.* Stolzenberg (2001), for example, used *constructed-pair data,* created from the Americans' Changing Lives (ACL) survey of individuals, to bring in dyadic relationships. The constructed-pair data allowed Stolzenberg to assess dyadic work–health effects within each couple. Van de Rijt and Buskens (2006) followed a similar strategy and created couple-level measures, such as "couple education."

Of course, there are other types of linked lives. Table 12.1 provides examples of the levels of data used in various studies, and the availability of dyad, organizational, and network data linked to individuals as well as larger social units. Bennett and Lehman (1999) studied work groups, investigating whether coworkers influence employees' substance use (see Table 12.1). Their study exemplifies the interconnectedness of employees in workplace settings, showing that work groups can influence individual behavior. Neighborhoods provide an example of lives that are linked in distal ways. Wheaton and Clarke (2003) drew on data from the National Survey of Children to construct neighborhood-level variables; they then assessed the relationship between a neighborhood's socioeconomic status while children were growing up and children's subsequent mental health in adulthood (see Table 12.1).

Data from Couples

The "gold standard" in studying couples is to collect data from both partners, as well as other members of the household, especially when rating

subjective appraisals (e.g., job or marital satisfaction, or mental health). For instance, Northouse, Mood, Templin, Mellon, and George (2000) examined couple role adjustment after a health diagnosis by interviewing both spouses separately about their respective adjustments. Gager and Sanchez (2003) used couple-level measures from the National Survey of Families and Households to capture the level of concordance or discordance between husbands' and wives' subjective perceptions of marital quality, time spent together, and risk of divorce. Using these couple-level measures, they were better able to understand the association between couples' perceptions and their actual risk of divorce, which, they found, varies by gender. Schoen, Rogers, and Amato (2006) used couple-level measures to assess the influence of marital happiness on wives' employment. Moen and Sweet (2003) used data from both spouses to create a couple work–hour variable. Using cluster analytic techniques, they found five patterned couple work–hour arrangements in their dual-earner, middle-class sample, the most common of which was the *neotraditional* pattern, with husbands putting in long hours and wives working far less. Additional examples in Table 12.1 show the multiplicity of research topics that can be addressed from the vantage point of linked lives.

Often surveys of individual respondents inquire about husbands or wives, or other family members. Having one person report about spousal characteristics makes sense, *provided* that respondents can be expected to offer reasonably accurate information about their spouses. We feel comfortable using one person as the reporter of concrete characteristics, such as a spouse's employment, work hours, educational level, or life stage, but not about the assessment by the persons interviewed about the quality of their spouses' personal or marital lives, or their plans and expectations about the future.

Methods of Analysis

Most social science is variable-oriented, analyzing relationships between two or more variables at one point in time, with variations in one or more measure "explaining" variations in another measure. Such statistical techniques also permit researchers to "control" for the effects of other factors that are extraneous to the variables of interest. But lives are linked as *interdependent social systems*, not as isolated variables. A life course approach points to the importance of asking the "right" questions, in this case, questions that lead to ways of theorizing and analyzing linked lives. One key question is: In what social-relational systems are the studied individuals embedded?

TABLE 12.1. Examples of Research Linking Lives

Outcome of interest	Citation	Theoretical unit of analysis	Operational unit of analysis	Data set	Measurement
Education	Sweet & Moen (2007)	Couple level	Husband–wife dyad	Ecology of Careers Study April 1998–March 2000	• Dependent variable: entry and departure to/from school • Independent variables (e.g., family satisfaction) assessed by both wife and husband
Marriage	Gager & Sanchez (2003)	Couple level	Individual and spouse or partner dyad	National Survey of Families and Households 1987–1988 and 1992–1994	• Dependent variable: marital dissolution, measured as separation or divorce • Independent variables (e.g., marital happiness) constructed with separate partner evaluations
Marriage	Schoen, Rogers, & Amato (2006)	Couple level	Individual and spouse or partner dyad	National Survey of Families and Households 1987–1988 and 1992–1994	• Dependent variable: marital happiness and wives' employment • Independent variables (e.g., marital quality and marital stability) using separate evaluations from partners
Marriage	Van de Rijt & Buskens (2006)	Couple level	Individual	Chicago Health and Social Life Survey 1995–1997	• Dependent variable: marital status • Independent variables (e.g., age, education, trying to become pregnant) as reported by one partner in the relationship
Health and illness	Northouse et al. (2000)	Couple level	Husband–wife dyad and patient–caregiver dyad	Sample of colon cancer patients and their spouses	• Dependent variable: spousal role adjustment measured separately for patient and spouse • Independent variables (e.g., psychosocial adjustment) assessment scales given to patient and spouse
Health and illness	Bennett & Lehman	Work-group level	Work groups	Sample of employees in two cities in	• Dependent variable: negative consequences of coworkers' alcohol and substance use

	(1999)			southwestern U.S.	• Independent variables (e.g., job stress) asked of each group member
Health and illness	Stolzenberg (2001)	Couple level	Individual	Americans' Changing Lives (ACL) survey 1986 and 1989	• Dependent variable: husband's–wife's health • Independent variables (e.g., employment, educational attainment, family income) as reported by husband or wife
Health and illness	Christakis & Fowler (2007)	Social-network level	Social network	Framingham Heart Study 1971–2003	• Dependent variable: weight gain • Independent variable: weight gain among social ties
Health and illness	Wheaton & Clarke (2003)	Neighborhood level	Neighborhood	National Survey of Children 1976, 1981, 1987	• Dependent variable: adult mental health • Independent variables: neighborhood socioeconomic status, and individual exposure to stressful events
Employment	Singley & Hynes (2005)	Couple level	Husband–wife dyad	New Parents Study: in-depth interviews with new-parent couples from Cornell Couples and Careers Study	• Dependent variable: new parents' decision about paid work • Other varying factors: effect work–family policies on decision making, parents' joint negotiation of new roles
Employment	Raley, Mattingly, & Bianchi (2006)	Couple level	Individual	Current Population Survey (March Supplement) 1970, 1980, 1990, 2001	• Dependent variable: percentage of income contributed by husband and wife, as reported by spouse responding to survey • Independent variable: spousal employment reported by spouse responding to survey
Employment	Dahlin, Kelly, & Moen (2008)	Social-network level	Individual	Ecology of Careers Study April 1998–March 2000	• Dependent variable: social ties to person with whom respondent discussed important matters • Independent variables: family satisfaction, work hours, job tenure, firm size, and total network size

Impact of Relational Context

Life course scholars theorize about *lives in context*, examining historical, cultural, and structural risks, resources, and constraints shaping life chances and life quality. Social convoys are a key part of the contexts in which individuals' beliefs, behaviors, and strategic adaptations play out. Two popular quantitative methods facilitate locating individuals within larger social groups: hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; also known as "multilevel modeling") and network analysis (Bennett & Lehman, 1999; Straits, 1996; Wheaton & Clarke, 2003). HLM allows researchers to consider group-level *and* individual-level effects simultaneously. An important aspect of HLM is its capacity to identify the impact of various contexts (families, cohorts, work groups) on individual behavior. For example, Bennett and Lehman (1999) used HLM to understand the effect of coworker substance use on employees' behaviors.

Network analysis is another way of locating individuals within relational contexts and identifying characteristics of their relationship. Straits (1996), for example, used General Social Survey network data to investigate whether coworker ties are gendered. Dahlin, Kelly, and Moen (2008) have drawn on similar types of network data in the Ecology of Careers Study, and finding that dual-earner employees tend to have close relationships with kin and coworkers but not neighbors.

Both HLM and network analysis can capture social networks at one point in time, providing a "snapshot" of linked lives. Ethnography, in-depth interviews, life histories, and historical trend data can capture the dynamics of social convoys as they shift in composition and influence over time. For example, in her study of the gendered division of housework and family care among couples, Hochschild (1989) used interview and observational data to investigate how relationships play out as processes over time. Another strategy is to collect, graph, and analyze *life histories*. Life history data can be collected either retrospectively, by asking about past experiences, or prospectively, by following people over a period of months or years.

Dynamics of Higher-Level Units

A second key question is: Do couples, families, networks, or work groups operate as systems or as loose configurations of individuals? This question of how *couples, families, networks, or work groups operate* in making decisions, dividing up tasks, or allocating resources, as well as the degree to which they hold similar beliefs and values, moves the focus of interest from individuals to higher-level units. These groups can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Table 12.2 provides an overview of studies

TABLE 12.2. Examples of Alternative Data Sources and Methods for Analyzing Linked Lives

Data sets	Highest level	Date of collection	Study design	Examples of methods
Ecology of Careers Study Subsets	Couple level	1998–2000	Mixed method	Ordinary least squares and general linear models (Sweet & Moen, 2007)
Cornell Couples and Careers Study	Couple level	1997–1998	Mixed method	Qualitative analysis (Becker & Moen, 1999)
New Parents Study	Couple level	2000–2001	In-depth interviews	Qualitative analysis (Singley & Hynes, 2005)
National Survey of Families and Households	Couple level	1987–1988 and 1992–1994	Longitudinal survey	Event–history analysis (Gager & Sanchez, 2003; Schoen, Rogers, & Amato, 2006)
Qualitative interviews	Couple level		In-depth interviews	Qualitative analysis (Gerstel, 2000)
National Survey of Children	Neighborhood level	1976, 1981, 1987	Longitudinal survey	Hierarchical linear models (Wheaton & Clarke, 2003)
General Social Survey	Network level	1985	Cross-sectional survey	Negative binomial regression analysis (Straits, 1996)

using a range of types of data and methods, including in-depth interviews, cross-sectional surveys, longitudinal surveys, and mixed methods to study couples, families, workgroups, or other units of interest.

One potential methodological difficulty, however, is that information from two or more people in relationships is not statistically independent (Maguire, 1999; Thompson & Walker, 1982). This issue can be avoided by creating variables that are truly relational, such as difference scores (e.g., in couples, his age minus hers), ratios (her salary divided by his), or typologies based on both spouses' circumstances, behavior, or values (e.g., whether both partners are religious, the husband only, the wife only, or neither partner is religious). Maguire (1999) suggests the use of intraclass correlations of both partners' values as an index of within-couple similarity or difference. She also points to the utility of repeated-measures analysis of variance if the research question relates to within-dyad levels and directions of difference among diverse subgroups of couples.

Ethnographic and in-depth qualitative data are especially useful in the study of relationships as processes and social systems (cf. Becker & Moen, 1999; Cowan & Cowan, 1999; Gerstel, 2000). Drawing on existing long-term panel studies can provide the data necessary to reconstruct the life courses of respondents as they intersect over time. Putting together the life histories of spouses can reveal the ways their paths converge, intertwine, and diverge at different points in the life course of each. Collecting life histories from members of couples in different cohorts, cultures, or settings can illuminate both similarities and differences over historical time, as well as subcultural similarities and differences in social relationships. For example, Moen and Roehling (2005) used life history vignettes of individuals and couples to illustrate the (gendered) processes of combining work and family career paths. Han and Moen (1999, 2001) used job histories (collected separately from husbands and wives with the use of life history calendars) to capture the career pathways of husbands and wives. Figure 12.1 provides an example of a life history calendar.

Other Questions

Glen Elder always tells colleagues and students that the key to life course research is asking the right questions. Even when life history data are absent, it may prove useful before launching a study of linked lives to undertake a basic armchair description of the phenomenon of interest and to examine the larger context in which it is occurring. For example, what is the nature of the sample? How is the focus of study embedded in and affected by the historical times, as well as by biographical and

Respondent's ID _____ Date of birth _____

	AGE YEAR	e.g., 18–28 e.g., 1990	29–39	40–49	50–60	61–69
EMPLOYMENT HISTORY Occupation Title/part time or full time or more Unemployed/not in labor force Reason for change						
EDUCATION HISTORY Type, date, degree						
GEOGRAPHICAL MOVES						
MARITAL/PARTNERSHIP HISTORY Date/changes						
FAMILY CHANGE/ HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION Birth of child/gender Leaving home, returning Relationship to respondent, changes						
PARTNER'S EMPLOYMENT Occupation, title, part time or full time						
RESPONDENT'S HEALTH HISTORY Illnesses, disabilities/severity, duration Hospital stays, surgery						
SPOUSE'S/CHILDREN'S HEALTH HISTORY Illnesses, disabilities/severity						
VOLUNTEER WORK Type, days, amount of time Reasons for change						
CAREGIVING Amount of time, for whom, why						

ADDITIONAL NOTES /QUOTES HERE:

FIGURE 12.1. Sample life history calendar (collapsed).

institutional clocks? Who else is affected? This "thought experiment" can uncover new questions and unexpected patterns. For example, in a study of adult students, Sweet and Moen (2007) investigated how a husband's or wife's return to school affects not just the returnee but also his or her spouse. In an analysis of social networks, Dahlin et al. (2008) examined whether most nonfamily social ties are now work- rather than neighborhood-related. In a study of family time pressures, Clarkberg and Moen (2001) asked why couples confronting a time squeeze do not opt to have both partners work part time.

Asking such counterintuitive questions, even if they cannot always be answered, can illuminate the hidden cultures and structures shaping virtually every "choice" and every social relationship. For example, couples rarely "choose" to have both spouses work part time because part-time jobs do not offer sufficient income, much less the medical care, pensions, security, and prospects traditionally associated with full-time employment. Consequently, as Becker and Moen (1999) and Moen and Orrange (2002) found, when couples want or need to scale back at work because of family responsibilities, the most common strategy is to have the wife reduce her hours or else leave the workforce for a time. Why is this strategy gendered, with the wife being the one to scale back? To answer such questions requires knowledge of the historical, structural, cultural, and biographical embeddedness of lives and relationships.

To be sure, researchers often have scant contextual data and little knowledge of respondents' relationships or circumstances prior to data collection. But imagination, a review of existing literature, and some evidence gleaned from available data can illuminate the contexts and pathways by which respondents arrive and remain in the particular sample you plan to use. This process matters, because there are almost always issues of sample selection, that is, skewing based on who is not included in the sample, leading to sample selection bias, which we discuss next.

Data Limitations

It is always important to consider the possibility of "selection bias" (the absence within a study sample of values on a particular variable of interest). Often selection bias reflects self-selection of people into or out of the group being investigated. For example, individuals "select" themselves into or out of certain couple dyads: They enter into relationships, cohabit, get married, and/or get divorced. Or they are selected out by events, such as becoming widowed.

Consider a study of spousal or child abuse drawing on data from a random sample of families. Families with especially high levels of spou-

sal or child abuse may not even be in a community sample of households, since these families have either dissolved themselves (divorce, separation) or been dissolved by social service agencies (foster care, no visitation rights). Similarly, couples with high levels of work–family conflict may no longer be in a dual-earner sample, because one partner might have left the workforce (Stone, 2007).

Selection bias may well affect research results. A study of couple marital satisfaction may find that older couples tend to be more satisfied than younger couples with their marriages. Is this an age, cohort, or marital duration effect? Or is it simply because the most conflicted couples got divorced years ago, excluding themselves from the "older married couple" sample?

Panel data following individuals, couples, or other groupings over time may also be subject to selection bias, depending on who drops out and who is apt to stay in the sample. For instance, Han and Moen (2001) found that women who follow continuous, full-time career paths are more apt to divorce than are women with other career trajectories. Since these women would not be included in samples of couples, this career strategy (opting out of a marriage) is overlooked.

Consider how the people being studied have come to be where they are at the historical point in time they are surveyed, observed, or interviewed. Ask why families in a study have specific members employed for certain hours in certain jobs; why they have no, one, two, or more children; why they spend little, a moderate amount, or a lot of time together; and why they live in the neighborhoods, houses, or cities they do.

As a case in point, recall that Moen and Sweet (2002; Sweet & Moen, 2007) drew on a subsample from the Ecology of Careers Study to investigate the phenomenon of "coworking couples," in which both spouses work for the same employer. There are a number of pathways to being part of a coworking couple: Partners may meet because they are students in the same field—such as law or engineering—and thereafter pursue the same type of occupation, seeking jobs together. Or couples may have met on the job, which means that they were coworkers before they were in a relationship. Or an employer wanting to retain a valued employee might find a job for that employee's spouse. Moen and Sweet (2002) found that coworking husbands typically have longer tenure in the organization than do their wives, suggesting that most couples working for the same employer may have met on the job, or that the employer offered the wife a job when it appeared the husband might follow her as she sought employment elsewhere.

Selection bias is often dealt with as a methodological issue. But it is also a descriptive and theoretical issue, a way of thinking and theorizing

about the predictors or outcomes being investigated. Always ask who is/is not in a sample and why. Does this represent selection as a result of individual choice or systematic exclusion?

Linked Lives and Convoys as the Object of Study

Scholars can study linked lives from a number of vantage points. Even though most available social science information (data) is about individuals, life course researchers can bring relationships into their theoretical and analytic models by (1) looking at demographic and historical trends in relationships over time, (2) investigating crossover from one person to another, (3) theorizing and examining group-level adaptive strategies, and (4) considering trajectories and transitions, the ways relationships both shape and are shaped by the time and timing of experiences and insights of individuals. Each of these four approaches offers considerable payoff.

Studying the Demography of Linked Lives over Time

One way of studying linked lives is as *trends over time*, drawing on census or other time series data to chart marriage or fertility rates for different subgroups of the population. Topics that can be examined in this way are household-related relationships—the average age of marriage or parenthood, the incidence of divorce and remarriage, the percentages of dual-earner or single-parent households—as they increase or decline over time. There are also time use data that permit the study of trends in men's and women's division of paid and unpaid labor, as well as the amount and distribution of leisure time. Life course researchers also study how individual and couple strategies shift over time (Elder & Shanahan, 2006; Heinz, 1996, 2002). For example, Raley, Mattingly, and Bianchi (2006) use repeated cross-sectional individual-level data—the Current Population Survey—to create a range of couple-level measures, such as couples' educational attainment, number of children, and life stage, to capture trends in dual-earner couple status.

Moving the focus from individual to group characteristics is yet another strategy for capturing trends. For example, Jacobs and Gerson (2004) charted trends in couples' working hours over time, showing that work hours have increased at the family level. Researchers can theorize and investigate a number of group-level outcomes, such as rates, differences, similarities, and/or totals. These are concepts about relationships, not individuals—such as *age difference* (i.e., between spouses), *homogamy* (i.e., similarity in religion, social class, fertility plans, or politi-

cal attitudes), or the *degree of inequality* (i.e., division of household labor between spouses; differences in salaries, status, power, or couple-level decision-making strategies).

Capturing trends in relationships and behavior over time reveals that the human impacts of large-scale social transformations—technological, demographic, economic, and cultural—are invariably filtered through networks of close and distal ties of obligation, expectation, and interpretation (cf. Heinz, 1996, 2002), in other words, lives that are linked together.

Studying Dynamic Crossover Effects in Real Time and Motion

The mechanisms by which lives are linked are especially apparent when viewed from the perspective of *crossover* effects. For example, Almeida and colleagues (Almeida, Chandler, & Wethington, 1999; Larson & Almeida, 1999; Yorgason, Almeida, Neupert, Spiro, & Hoffman, 2006) used daily diary methods to examine whether a husband's experience of conflict on the job affects his wife's experience of stress, and vice versa, as well as stress crossover from one generation (parents) to the next (children).

Researchers can also study crossover effects using survey data. For example, one study found that when one member of a couple is involved in caring for an aging relative, this "crosses over" to affect the well-being of the spouse, but it does so differently depending on whether the husband or the wife is the caregiver (see Chesley & Moen, 2006).

Studying Strategies of Adaptation

A particularly fruitful approach incorporates the concept of *family-level adaptive strategies*. When something happens to one person, such as job loss, or to the household, such as the birth of a child, how do relationships and roles change? Decisions about employment provide one example of various couple-level adaptive strategies. Women and men as members of couples, as parents, as adult children of aging parents, and as employees make *strategic selections* about whether and how to combine work and family roles within the context of their relationships. Couples make strategic (and often gendered) selections about who will work for pay, and for how many hours, as well as who will care for infants or aging family members. These choices in turn produce and reproduce gender differentiation and inequality in roles and resources (Blossfeld & Drobnič, 2001; Chesley, 2005; Clarkberg & Moen, 2001; Dentinger & Clarkberg, 2002; Drobnič & Blossfeld, 2004; Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003).

One potentially fruitful way of theorizing and studying adaptive strategies is to consider a spouse's behavior as predictive of the respondent's own behavior. In families raising children, a mother or father who travels a lot on the job may well predict limited job-related travel by the other parent. Such strategies are *compensatory*, in that one person is compensating (by limiting his or her own travel) for the other's absence.

Or strategies might reflect *competing choices*—such as by professional couples who may have the same education and training but find they must prioritize one person's jobs over that of the other partner (e.g., deciding to move for one person's advancement). Over time such couple-level decisions produce (within couples and across gender) disparities in earnings and status that widen with age (see Pixley, 2008).

Some couples may follow *parallel paths*, taking turns in child care and allotting equal time to each person's job. Or each member might operate *independently*, making decisions and following paths that are not interdependent. Cohabiting couples, for example, may be more apt to have separate bank accounts and to keep purchases separate, something that might change with marriage or the birth of a child. Couples who live apart may also pursue independent tracks.

The very nature of the linkage between members of a couple can vary over the life course and may also differ depending on the question of interest. Young marrieds may be similar in some ways because of assortative mating: People tend to marry others very much like themselves. Or else one or both members of the couple may "adapt" to the other in ways that foster homogamy. Still another possibility is that similar couples could become different by strategically selecting different behaviors—such as differences in their work hours or job travel—to allow one person to compensate at home for the long absences of the other.

It is important to recognize that couple patterns can only be understood within the multilayered contexts of relationships, norms, and opportunities/constraints. Life course scholars can contribute to greater understanding of linked lives by identifying the number and frequency of patterns, as well as the factors predicting them. Scholars can also show how choices earlier in the life course can contribute to differences and inequalities within and among couples over time.

Couples can also accommodate to prior decisions over time. In their study of marital happiness and wives' employment, Schoen et al. (2006) found that over about a 5-year time span, couples were able to adopt adaptive or protective strategies to compensate for any negative effects associated with the wives' moving back into employment.

Life course researchers can capture the human meaning of large-scale social changes by studying the strategic adaptations of couples or

other units in particular times and places. The value of Pavalko and Elder's (1993) study of women's involvement in and support of their husbands' careers is that it locates linked lives in historical time (early 20th century) and place (United States). Today more couples are dual earners, but jobs and career paths remain constructed as if workers have no family responsibilities (see Moen & Roehling, 2005). Many couples who start out with similar occupational goals, and who strongly believe in gender equality, often find themselves following neotraditional strategies. Gendered career paths become especially prominent around the transition to parenthood (Stone, 2007) and the transition to caring for impaired parents and other relatives (Gerstel, 2000).

Lives as Trajectories and Transitions, Evolving in and over Time

The life course theme of linked lives invariably incorporates and plays out over *time*. As Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1983, p. 360) remind us, "Not only the person, but also the context, undergoes a course of development."

Early experiences and choices of couples may well set the course of each partner's life, as well as the trajectory of the relationship. Consider the transition to adulthood (Moen & Orrange, 2002; Mortimer, 2003), the transition of two people moving in together (Brines & Joyner, 1999; Clarkberg, 1999), the transition to or timing of parenthood (Altucher & Williams, 2003; Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005; Reichart, Chesley, & Moen, 2007), and the transition to retirement (Han & Moen, 1999; Moen, Sweet, & Swisher, 2005)—all of which tend to recalibrate the nature and direction of both work and family ties for couples, as well as for men and women as individuals.

A life course focus on linked lives can illuminate the ways that gender plays out in a wide range of venues. Family care arrangements, spousal interactions, and power relationships, work–home conflicts and enhancements, couples' conjoint retirement plans and transitions, caring for sick and infirm relatives (often adult children caring for older parents) are examples of the ways lives are linked over time in distinctive ways for women and men (cf. Chesley & Moen, 2006; Gerstel, 2000; Northouse et al., 2000; Pavalko & Woodbury, 2000). For example, one study found that older women who care for their ailing husbands are more likely to exit the workforce as a response to these care responsibilities, whereas older men who care for ailing wives are unlikely to leave their jobs and hire care providers rather than taking on that role themselves (Dentinger & Clarkberg, 2002).

Methodological advances and the availability of longitudinal data are allowing life course scholars to operationalize and analyze interde-

pendent trajectories and transitions—of couples, of family members in different generations, and of members of different cohorts.

Broadening the Focus

We conclude where we began: Most social scientists study individuals, not groups. More precisely, most social scientists study *variables about* individuals. When relationships are brought into the analysis, it is often as "controls" (i.e., controlling for marital status). In this chapter we have pointed to the value of theorizing (and suggested methods for studying) individuals' lives as linked lives, embedded in social convoys of ongoing relationships over the life course. Broadening the focus beyond individuals can reveal the effects of social ties on the economic security, occupational status, health, and behavior of individuals, families, and members of organizations, as well as of different cohorts.

We have also emphasized social convoys as key to understanding the ways macro-level social structures and forces play out in the micro-level experiences and perceptions of individuals. The impacts of large-scale forces on individuals and groups—in terms of both social stability and social change—are filtered through networks of close and distal ties (convoys) of obligation, expectation, and interpretation. For example, changing gender norms and a globalizing information economy have transformed the lives of women and, thereby, also have transformed men's and children's experiences. Greater longevity and economic downsizing are affecting couples' deliberations about when either partner should retire and couples' actual experiences of the retirement status passage.

We have used couples to illustrate the interdependence of lives moving through time. Couples provide a good case example of fairly stable units of individuals who move in tandem along various family and employment trajectories and transitions. But the concepts and methods we describe are equally useful for other forms of linked lives, those spanning generations, such as the ongoing social convoys of parents and children, and the far looser but important links among coworkers or cohorts of high school or college graduates.

Generational Convoys

Families as institutionalized relational arrangements evolve and are transformed as children are born, enter school, then graduate from elementary school, high school, college—at some point leaving (as well as returning to) the family nest. At each stage, families operate within

the context of legitimated regimens reinforcing traditional within-household distributions and divisions of resources and labor, along with bundles of intergenerational, interpersonal, and intimate relationships (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006; Daly, 2003). Studying linked lives across generations allows life course scholars to consider relationships between family members at different ages and life stages. In their review of marital interaction, Gottman and Notarius (2000) described research on child outcomes leading to the following questions: How do parents' relationships while children are young affect children later on during *their* adult course? Are parents' marital problems replicated in the adult children's own marriages? Using longitudinal data on parents and their offspring, Amato and Booth (2001) found that marital problems of parents predict their adult children's marital problems. Orbuch, Thornton, and Cancio (2000) also showed that marital disruption affect the parent–child bond. And Zarit and Eggebeen (2002) categorized the parent–child relationship as a life-span issue, noting that these intergenerational linkages have become progressively more important as life expectancy has increased.

Another example of lives linked across generations is the multigenerational relationship between grandparents, parents, and children, the importance of which life course scholar Vern Bengtson recognized early (1975). Over the last several decades, life course researchers have highlighted the diversity of these relationships (Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Silverstein, Bengtson, & Lawton, 1997). For example, Giarrusso, Feng, Silverstein, and Bengtson (2001) underscored variations within and across gender and ethnic groups in cross-generational relationships by drawing on data collected separately from grandparents and adult children.

Who is the best reporter of generational relationships? Feng, Silverstein, Giarrusso, McArdle, and Bengtson (2006) found that adult children are better at reporting "more objective aspects of their intergenerational relationship" (p. S327) than the older parents themselves. But no one is guaranteed as the "best" reporter: They also found that whereas older parents *under*estimate their dependency on their adult children, the adult children *over*estimate their parents' dependency on them.

Lives More Loosely Linked

Much social connectedness consists of weak ties among individuals who are not related to one another, such as coworkers, friends, club members, or other social networks. Studying such relations through hierarchical models permits analysis of group and individual effects simultaneously. Research on workgroups using HLM examines effects on

employees working in teams of numerous different variables, such as employment policies (Blair-Loy & Wharton, 2002), supervisor support (Griffin, Patterson, & West, 2001), and group cohesiveness and behavior (Kidwell, Mossholder, & Bennett, 1997). Analyzing work groups permits focus on the culture, policies, and practices characterizing particular subgroups within organizations. For instance, in their analysis of work groups, Blair-Loy and Wharton (2002) showed that employees working with powerful colleagues and supervisors are more likely to use work–family policies. In a study of group absenteeism among employee workgroups, Mason and Griffin (2003) examined group effects over time using HLM. Though not yet common, longitudinal group-level data provide a promising window into the dynamics of the social organization of coworkers, as well as neighborhood and other social relations over time.

Another fruitful area of inquiry is the use of catch-up samples of cohorts of individuals graduating from the same high school or college the same year and interviewing them years later (Komarovsky, 1985; Strober & Chan, 1999; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). Griffith (2002), who used multilevel techniques to study military groups, found that soldiers within combat units reported enhanced combat readiness if they had supportive leaders and cooperative peer relations.

Next Steps: Theorizing and Measuring Context and Process

A life course theoretical approach is increasingly popular among social scientists (sociologists, economists, psychologists, anthropologists), in large part because of the confluence of social changes now transforming lives and rendering existing blueprints obsolete. Previously taken-for-granted transitions into and out of social relationships are becoming more contingent and more varied, with widespread implications for individuals, groups, and society. Contemporary adults are (1) returning to school at all ages, or young adults are staying in school longer; (2) delaying marriage or not marrying at all; (3) delaying childbearing or having no (or fewer) children; and (4) retiring early, late, not at all, or several times. Traditionally, each of these topics has been studied in isolation, and frequently only in the cross section, either as choices of individuals or as societal trends, not as linked choices and convoys.

In this chapter we have argued that a life course focus on social convoys can promote understanding of continuity and change in lives, families, communities, networks, and organizations—as well as how they intersect with one another. Married women's occupational paths and work hours cannot be understood apart from the parallel occupational

paths and work hours of their husbands. Even retirement is increasingly a couple transition. These examples point to the way social transformations (in gender ideologies, families, and labor markets), change social relationships and how relationships in turn shape individuals' beliefs, behavior, and decision making.

One way to capture the dynamics of linked lives is to collect panel data over a span of time. But because most of us cannot do so, another strategy is to collect life histories, ask each of those whose lives are linked about their transitions and trajectories, and record them in life history calendars, then put the calendars together.

Life course scholars have a real opportunity to contribute to the mapping of the 21st-century life course, as well as the effects of large-scale historical events and cultural, demographic, technological or economic transformations on people's lives. Doing so requires studying social convoys as dynamic systems and as mediators between social forces and individuals' life chances and life quality across the life course.

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